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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006946

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY CONCERNED ABOUT KIRKUK ELECTION DELAY AND  
POSSIBLE KRG REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE; VISITING KDP  
OFFICIAL (TO US) LINKS THE TWO

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2092

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2102

[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 2137

Classified By: DCM Robert S. Deutsch for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

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[1](#)1. (C) MFA Director General for the Middle East called in DCM Dec. 14 to express concern about three issues: the KDP flag flying over the Iraqi customs building at the Turkey/Iraq border, a possible delay in Governorate elections in Kirkuk, and reports that the KRG may hold a referendum on Kurdish independence on Jan. 30. DCM responded that we have pushed the Kurdish leadership and IIG on our view that elections should be held on time everywhere in the country. A visiting senior KDP official told us Dec. 13 that the KRG might hold such a referendum if the IIG does not take Kurdish concerns about Kirkuk "seriously." We cannot evaluate from Ankara whether the Iraqi Kurds would in fact go through with such a referendum, but such a vote would be hugely difficult for the GOT to swallow. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) MFA Director General for the Middle East called in DCM on Dec. 14 to discuss Iraq. Celikkol reported briefly on Turkish outreach efforts to Sunni parties in Iraq for upcoming elections (septel), then raised three issues of concern to Turkey: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) flag being raised at the Turkish/Iraqi border, Kurdish demands to delay governorate council elections in Kirkuk, and possible Kurdish plans for a de facto referendum on independence.

KDP Flag Flying at Habur

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[1](#)3. (C) Celikkol reported that the Iraqi flag over the Iraqi border customs building at the Habur Gate had recently been removed and replaced with the KDP flag. He stated that Turkey firmly believes that the flag should be Iraqi. Celikkol added that the Turkish embassy in Baghdad has raised this issue with IIG authorities.

Election Delay in Kirkuk?

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[1](#)4. (C) Celikkol said that Turkey is concerned about recent attempts by the KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) to delay Kirkuk Governorate Council elections. He emphasized that Turkey believes elections should take place everywhere in the country on time.

[1](#)5. (C) DCM responded that we share Turkey's position, and we have pressed hard on this issue in recent weeks both in Baghdad and Kirkuk with IIG leaders and Kurdish leaders. We also understand that the Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI) has confirmed that these elections shall take place in Kirkuk on Jan. 30.

Kurdish Referendum on Independence?

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[1](#)6. (C) Celikkol said that Turkey has seen reports--though perhaps only rumors--that Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) leaders are planning for a "fourth ballot box" (i.e., in addition to boxes for national, KRG, and Governorate elections) where Kurds would vote on whether they would prefer to break away from Iraq and become an independent state. While apparently Kurdish leaders would portray such a vote as only a non-binding measure of public opinion, Celikkol warned that such a step would amount to a referendum on independence. "This would be very unacceptable," Celikkol stated. Celikkol said this was an unconfirmed report, and that he was seeking clarification. DCM responded that this would be news to us, and that we would pass this information on to Baghdad and Washington.

Visiting KDP Official to Emboff: IIG  
Must Take Us Seriously...

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17. (C) On Dec. 13, PolMilOff met with Safeen Dizayee, head of the KDP's international bureau and former KDP representative in Ankara. PolMilOff repeated USG position (per reftels) that we oppose delaying the elections in Kirkuk, and urged that the KDP and PUK consider options that would allow them to agree to go forward with elections Jan. 30. Dizayee responded that progress to solve the Kirkuk issue under Article 58 of the TAL has been glacial, and complained especially that the Iraqi Property Claims Commission process "has been a total failure." Dizayee also contended that local IECI officials have denied to most Kurdish IDPs the right to vote in Kirkuk; he claimed the IECI is dominated by non-Kurds and has not treated the Kurds fairly.

...If They Don't, Referendum Is Possible  
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18. (C) Dizayee reported that within the next few days Jalal Talabani of the PUK and Nechirvan Barzani of the KDP would travel to Baghdad to discuss the Kirkuk election problem with senior IIG leaders, including PM Allawi (NOTE: Dizayee said the press of time and security considerations may dictate that the Kurdish leaders may not be able to travel to Baghdad; if not, they will conduct their consultations by telephone. END NOTE.) Dizayee emphasized that the Kurdish leaders will demand that IIG leaders "take seriously" Kurdish concerns about Kirkuk, but stopped short of saying that the election timing issue was non-negotiable. When PolMilOff asked Dizayee what the consequences would be if Kurdish leaders still were to insist on delayed elections in Kirkuk but the vote were to go forward anyway, he said one response might be to hold a referendum in the Kurdish areas on independence. Dizayee emphasized that Iraq's Kurds have compromised a great deal for the sake of a unified Iraq.

Comment: A Credible Threat?  
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19. (C) It is possible that Dizayee (perhaps even unwittingly; he met us in a public setting) is the source of the Turks' information that the Kurds are considering a referendum on independence. If not, however, we have two data points suggesting that this is on the Iraqi Kurds' minds. It goes without saying that such a vote would draw a harsh reaction from Turkey, since it would be seen as a serious threat to Iraq's territorial integrity. END COMMENT.

110. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.  
EDELMAN